

House Republican Press Release

March 31, 2006
Press Office: 860-240-8700

Gov. Rell, Reps Ferrari, Fahrbach; Sen. Kissel: \$209,553 Grant Okayed for Old New-Gate Prison Repairs



The State Bond Commission has approved a \$209,553 grant for repairs to the state-owned Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine in East Granby, Governor M. Jodi Rell, state Representatives Richard F. Ferrari, R- 62nd District, and Ruth C. Fahrbach, R-61st District, and state Senator John A. Kissel, R-7th District, announced today. The Bond Commission approved the funding at its monthly meeting today (Friday, March 31st).

“Old New-Gate Prison is one of the leading tourist attractions in Connecticut and these funds will make this National Historic Landmark better than ever,” Governor Rell said. “I firmly believe that one of the most effective ways to protect our future is to protect our past. I am proud to announce these funds to preserve this very special state treasure.”

“As a state legislator and an East Granby resident, one of my most important goals always has been to protect and restore Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine as a unique historic site and an important link with East Granby’s past,” Representative Ferrari said. “Old New-Gate Prison also is a major economic asset for East Granby and other towns in the region. It attracts visitors from the Greater Hartford area, teachers and school children on class trips and tourists from throughout Connecticut and New England who patronize local hotels, motels, restaurants and other businesses.”

“This funding is an important part of our on-going effort to preserve Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine for the enjoyment of future generations. I’d like to thank Governor Rell and the Bond Commission for their commitment to preserving a vital element of our state’s historic heritage,” Representative Ferrari said.

“Just a few years ago, the threat of closure motivated a group of citizens to organize and draw attention to the need to preserve this historic landmark for future generations,” said Rep. Ruth Fahrbach, R-61st. “Today’s funding will begin the much-needed restoration of a truly unique part of Connecticut’s history.”

“I would like to thank Governor Rell for helping to secure this funding for East Granby and for recognizing the importance of preserving historic attractions in the state,” Senator Kissel said. “Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine in East Granby have drawn visitors from across New England for years and with the help of today’s funding will continue to attract tourists to North Central Connecticut.”

The funding will be used by Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, which operates Old New-Gate Prison, as the first phase of a major restoration and stabilization project at the historic site. The funding will be used to replace three leaking roofs, structural work on the oldest surviving prison building, and several smaller restoration projects.

The commission currently is meeting with architects to plan for additional projects at the museum.

The presence of copper ore on the site was noted in 1705 and it became one of the first commercial mines in the British Colonies. It was not a money-making venture, however, and work was abandoned in the 1750s.

In 1773, New-Gate was first used to house serious criminals. Tories and Loyalists were held there during the Revolutionary War. It was the first State Prison in America. New-Gate ceased operating as a prison in 1827.

Today, visitors to the museum enter through tall stone walls built in 1802 and pass into the prison yard. The original guardhouse is still standing and contains displays explaining the history of the site and a video of the mine tour. The ruins of other prison buildings remain. Visitors enter the mine by descending stairs which replace the ladder entrance used for nearly 200 years. Tours are self-guided, except by prior arrangement for groups.

Across the street from Old New-Gate is Viets Tavern, which stood at this location before the mines were converted to a prison in 1773. The first warden of the prison lived in this house, and it was associated with New-Gate until the prison closed in 1827.